



U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor

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Building Back Better: Investing in Improving Schools, Creating Jobs, and Strengthening Families and our Economy

Mark Mitsui

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Hello Chair Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, and members of the House Education and Labor Committee,

For the record my name is Mark Mitsui, I am the President of Portland Community College, in Portland Oregon. Thank you for having me here today to speak with you about the role workforce training will play in our recovery and the critical need for investments in community college infrastructure.

## WHY ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGES A GOOD INVESTMENT?

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**99%** of jobs created during the last recovery went to those with at least some postsecondary education.

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In Portland, we have a lot of bridges and I think of Portland Community College (PCC) as one of them. PCC is a bridge to opportunity and a better life through education and training. PCC is also a bridge that brings needed talent to local employers. In our community, like communities across this nation, on one side of the bridge are hardworking, talented people who need educational opportunity. On the other side, we have jobs that offer a living wage and keep our

economies growing. The community colleges are the bridge between those sides. By investing in the students who cross the bridge, and by investing in the bridge itself, we can help keep America on the forefront of the world economy and create a more equitable recovery. The community colleges are a key part of a functioning economy. An investment in community college infrastructure is vital to ensuring that our students are prepared for the jobs of the future.

Postsecondary credentials are the new minimum —according to Georgetown University, 99% of jobs created during the last recovery went to those with at least some postsecondary education.<sup>1</sup> As we look to build back better, to create an inclusive economy, we need to create pathways for individuals to develop the skills and earn post-secondary credentials. Unfortunately, about half of adults between the ages of 25 and 64, lack this new minimum, i.e. a postsecondary credential (“postsecondary credentials” include short term credentials, associate’s degrees, bachelor’s degree or a graduate degree).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the pandemic and rapid advancements in artificial intelligence are accelerating automation as employers seek to pandemic-proof their operations and increase productivity. For example, robot sales increased in non-automotive manufacturing by 64% in the 4th quarter of 2020.<sup>3</sup> The World Economic Forum estimates that by 2025, on a global basis, the time spent on work by humans and machines will be equal and this shift will displace 85 million jobs and create 97 million new roles within the same time frame.<sup>4</sup> Here in the US, this shift will impact our most marginalized communities<sup>5</sup> because automation will replace low-skill, repetitive tasks that are disproportionately filled by lower-income workers without postsecondary credentials.

Clearly, community colleges are at the intersection of these trends. Old jobs will be lost and new ones gained. The community colleges provide options for existing workers to upskill and new talent to enter into new, quality jobs that offer economic mobility. Workers need the community colleges to get those new skills.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/americas-divided-recovery/#:~:text=America's%20Divided%20Recovery%3A%20College%20Haves%20and%20Have%2DNot%20reveals%20that,jobs%20created%20during%20the%20recovery.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2021/#nation>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.seattletimes.com/business/technology/the-spread-of-covid-19-led-to-a-surge-in-orders-for-factory-robots/?utm\\_source=email&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=article\\_inset\\_1.1](https://www.seattletimes.com/business/technology/the-spread-of-covid-19-led-to-a-surge-in-orders-for-factory-robots/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=article_inset_1.1)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-in-black-america>

The good news is that the nation's community colleges provide an excellent return on investment. For example, for every dollar that taxpayers invest in PCC, they see a \$2.70 return (see attachment).

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Nationally, the community colleges serve **41%** of all undergraduates, **56%** of Native American undergrads, **53%** of LatinX undergrads, **43%** of African American undergraduates and **38%** of Asian Pacific Islanders.

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Investments in the community colleges also make sense if our country wants an economic recovery that is equitable. Community colleges serve a greater share of students of color than 4-year universities at a far lower cost. Nationally, the average community college tuition cost per year is \$3,770 vs. \$10,560 at a public 4-year university.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, the community colleges serve 41% of all undergraduates, 56% of Native American undergrads, 53% of LatinX undergrads, 43% of African American undergraduates and 38% of Asian Pacific Islanders.<sup>7</sup>

One example of a community college program that is already improving outcomes for first generation students of color is PCC's Future Connect program (a program that offers tuition assistance and wrap-around supports for low income students). For more information please see our video link in the footnote.<sup>8</sup>

## WHY ARE NEW CAPITAL INVESTMENTS NECESSARY?

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**The community colleges are our nation's bridges to the future, a critical part of our nation's human infrastructure.**

As the pandemic recedes, we are not looking simply to snap back to the way we were. We are working to emerge better able to meet the future, today.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fast-facts/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fast-facts/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34DQTpRSaUI>

Community colleges are enthusiastic, and thankful, for President Biden's Jobs Plan's \$12 billion community college infrastructure investment. We believe that this is a welcome and much needed initial investment. The reality on the ground is that deferred maintenance and the need for new or renovated instructional facilities far outweighs this initial amount. The increasing sophistication of technical education, which has a growing virtual component, requires continuous, large-scale capital investments. Nationally there is significant deferred maintenance and a call to refabricate outdated training centers and college buildings to meet the needs of tomorrow. If we want leading-edge workers with leading-edge skills, we need leading-edge equipment and instructional buildings.

In addition, academic facilities across the array of community colleges need modernization. Unfortunately, state and local support falls far short of this need. This results in an increasing backlog of unaddressed infrastructure projects and a mounting number of deferred maintenance needs, with an inevitable impact on educational opportunity. And now, as a result of COVID, buildings not only need to be designed with fires, earthquakes and sustainability in mind, but pandemics as well. Flexible space is needed to meet physical distancing requirements and heating ventilation and air-conditioning systems upgraded to meet airflow requirements.

Furthermore, across the state of Oregon you can see that the infrastructure cannot meet the current demands. Each year millions of dollars worth of requests for upgrades go unanswered from the state. Examples include, bonding capacity for new buildings, delayed safety improvements, transportation accommodations for students, room for profit generating incubators, and investments in classrooms for emerging disciplines.

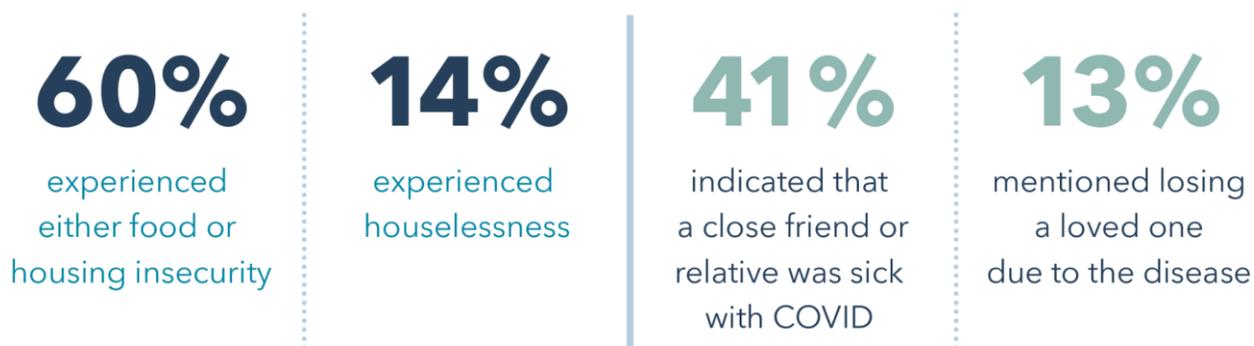
New instructional technology could also be made possible by a community college infrastructure investment. At Portland Community College, we are pursuing a pilot project using augmented and virtual reality technology (AR/VR). Initiated originally due to the pandemic, we are finding potential post-pandemic applications. We found that the students love it, job opportunities are growing daily, and industry analysis indicates there are measurable benefits in learning outcomes. The main barrier to adopting this teaching modality across multiple programs going forward is the one-time cost of equipment and associated software.

In evaluating facilities needs across all community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) estimates that the national total deferred maintenance, needed renovations and upgrades to be \$60 billion. This does not include new construction that colleges hope to undertake in the coming months and year. The President's community college proposal is a great start and desperately needed.

Finally, on April 22, 2021, President Biden announced a new climate target which will create new “green” jobs across many sectors. ACP and community college infrastructure investments can power a transition to a more just and carbon free economy by training workers to fill these new jobs and therefore avoid delays in the adoption of clean technology due to a skills gap. Without this investment, a new skills gap and a bigger equity gap are almost guaranteed.

The community colleges are our nation’s bridges to the future, a critical part of our nation’s workforce. As the pandemic recedes, we are not looking simply to snap back to the way we were. We are working to emerge better able to meet the future, today.

## STUDENT BARRIERS TO SUCCESS



The other half of the equation for our most vulnerable students is basic needs insecurity. This is a key barrier to access and completion. According to a national #RealCollege survey that was administered after the pandemic began, by the Hope Center at Temple University, nearly 60% of respondents indicated they experienced either food or housing insecurity, and 14% indicated experiencing houselessness. There were also significant disparities in basic needs insecurity. For example the Black – white gap was 16%. Additionally, 41% indicated that a close friend or relative was sick with COVID and 13% mentioned losing a loved one due to the disease. Black, Indigenous and LatinX students were twice as likely to report losing a loved one to COVID than were their white counterparts. Community college students were hit particularly hard by unemployment with 42% of students who were employed part time losing their jobs and 31% of students working full time, losing their employment.<sup>9</sup> What can states do to address critical barriers like basic needs insecurity?

Portland Community College is leading an initiative called Pathways to Opportunity (PTO). All 17

<sup>9</sup> <https://hope4college.com/rc2021-bni-during-the-ongoing-pandemic/>

of Oregon's community colleges are working with Oregon's Department of Human Services and many community-based organizations to integrate public benefits and wrap-around support services. One component of PTO is our STEP Project, Oregon's SNAP 50/50 program. All 17 community colleges are now part of the SNAP Employment and Training Program. In partnership with the Oregon Department of Human Services and the USDA Food and Nutrition Services division, we are employing a career pathways approach to moving food stamp eligible students out of poverty through education and training (see attachment). This work has inspired Oregon HB 2835, a state bill that if passed, would put a benefits navigator on public community college and university campuses across the state. Legislation like this ensures that all students are able to access the benefits and resources they qualify for, to gain the skills and credentials they need for good jobs (see attachment on PTO).

## THE BENEFITS OF AMERICA'S COLLEGE PROMISE

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In order to successfully complete training of any kind, **wrap around supports** are essential, particularly supports that address basic needs at the state and institutional level.

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In addition to the need for community college infrastructure is a plan to once again make workforce training and college affordable and accessible. America's College Promise (ACP) creates a federal-state partnership to provide free community college tuition, incentivizes and supports state reinvestment in public higher education, and provides grants to HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs, such as AANAPISI's to eliminate or reduce the cost of tuition for low-income students. There are a lot of strong policy elements to ACP. For example, it is a first-dollar-in program. This means that additional financial aid will give students a chance to pay for their basic needs and complete faster. ACP incentivizes states to reinvest in our community colleges. After the last recession, tuition prices increased as higher education budget cuts were used as a relief valve for state budgets. Suffice to say, by making tuition \$0 and by incentivizing states to improve access to and integration of benefits programs for college students, ACP is addressing key barriers to completion during and after the pandemic.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of the student success components of this bill, including the requirement to address basic needs insecurity and the Student Success Fund grant program. In order to successfully complete education and training of any kind, wrap around

supports are essential, particularly supports that address basic needs at the state and institutional level.

With proper support, our nation's community colleges can meet this challenge. America's College Promise, with its emphasis on incentivizing state support, will be an important strategy to upskill our workers, keep America on the global leading edge of technology and prevent both a skills gap and an equity gap in the coming recovery.

Finally, support for Minority Serving Institutions, HBCUs, and TCUs, are essential for bridging the equity gaps in our country. I'd like to end today with a student story. Tera Roberts was a single mom with eight children when she came to Portland Community College.<sup>10</sup>



She was in tears when she grabbed the Biology classroom door for the first time, frightened but determined. At PCC she found a community that supported and challenged her. Well, she was more than successful. Dr. Tera Roberts, now holds a doctorate in nursing and is the Associate Medical Director of School Based Health Centers at Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center. All eight of her children have completed postsecondary education and two of her children now teach at PCC. America's College Promise and the Community College infrastructure investments are about helping more people like Tera Roberts make it across that bridge of opportunity,

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<sup>10</sup> [Tera Roberts Film](#)

leading their family along with them to the other side. I ask that you support these packages and consider the positive, nationwide, and generational impacts of these investments.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Mitsui". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

[Mark Mitsui](#)

President Portland Community College